

IDEOLOGIES UNDERLYING THE USE OF PHOTOGRAPHS IN NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF BERSIH 3.0 RALLY: A SOCIAL SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS

JAMALI BUJANG SANAWI
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SARAWAK

Abstract

BERSIH 3.0 rally that was held on 28th April 2012 has witnessed visual war among the mass media in Malaysia which had caused polarization among the Malaysian society. This study aims to analyze how the mainstream and alternative newspapers transfuse their ideology about the rally through visual depiction of the event. Three dominant newspapers namely *Utusan Malaysia*, *The Star* and *Harakah* were chosen based on their political economic background and their high circulations status. Based on the visual constructions of the two mainstream newspapers; *Utusan Malaysia* and *The Star*, it is found that both newspapers were critical towards BERSIH 3.0. Apart from that, both newspapers also embedded their own racial agenda in which it was found that *Utusan Malaysia* tries to associate the rally with the dark tragedy of 13th May 1969 while *The Star* tries to neutralize the involvement of the Chinese through positive imagery. In contrast, *Harakah* celebrated the revival and the unity of the people from all races in their struggle towards social justice as the main theme. At the same time, *Harakah* visually portrayed PAS as a political party that honoured pluralism, gain acceptance from young people and committed with the PR. The research has proved that photo has the capabilities to be a medium to disseminate ideology.

Keywords: *Ideologies; photograph; bersih 3.0; social semiotic, visual*

IDEOLOGI BERDASARKAN PENGGUNAAN FOTOGRAF DALAM AKHBAR SEMASA LIPUTAN PERARAKAN BERSIH 3.0: SATU ANALISIS SEMIOTIK SOSIAL

Abstrak

Perarakan BERSIH 3.0 yang berlangsung pada 28 April 2012 telah menyaksikan perang visual dalam kalangan media massa di Malaysia yang telah menyebabkan polarisasi dalam masyarakat Malaysia. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana akhbar arus perdana dan alternatif mengadun ideologi mereka mengenai perarakan tersebut dalam bentuk gambaran visual. Tiga akhbar dominan *Utusan Malaysia*, *The Star* dan *Harakah* telah dipilih berdasarkan pada latarbelakang politik dan ekonomi dan status edaran yang tinggi. Berdasarkan pada konstruksi visual kedua-dua akhbar perdana *Utusan Malaysia* dan *The Star*, kajian menunjukkan kedua-dua akhbar bersikap kritikal terhadap BERSIH 3.0. Dan lagi, kedua-dua akhbar ada menyelitikan agenda ras dimana didapati *Utusan Malaysia* cuba menyamakan perarakan tersebut dengan peristiwa hitam 13 Mei 1969 sementara *The Star* cuba meneutralkan keterlibatan kaum Cina melalui imej positif. *Harakah* pula meraikan kebangkitan dan penyatuan masyarakat dari semua kaum dalam perjuangan kearah keadilan sosial sebagai tema utama mereka. Pada masa yang sama, *Harakah* memaparkan secara visual PAS sebagai parti politik yang menyanjung pluralisma, mendapat restu dari golongan muda dan komited dengan PR. Kajian ini telah membuktikan bahawa foto mampu menjadi medium untuk menyebarkan ideologi.

Kata kunci: *Ideologi, fotografi, bersih 3.0, semiotik sosial, visual*

INTRODUCTION

Since her independence, Malaysia can be deemed as a politically stable country with the incumbent party, Barisan Nasional (BN) consistently governed the country for over half a century. However, as the country flourishes economically, the maturity of its people in politics develop progressively and began to post new challenges to the governing party to remain in power. With improved education levels and access to communication technology such as the internet, the Malaysian society is exposed to liberal ideas and the concept of Western-

style democracy. Malaysian society increasingly daring to go out of their comfort zone and express their opinion, especially among the urban community who are critical towards every actions taken by the government, at a time when the mainstream media is said to be 'silent' on any misconduct in the administration. The people are no longer felt restricted to exercise their right in a democratic society and willing to protest on the street if necessary.

In 1997, the economic crisis that hit most Asian countries had sent Malaysia into political turmoil and fundamentally changing its landscape. The crisis has led to the dismissal of the then deputy prime minister, Anwar Ibrahim from his post due to his overt criticism towards the government. He later proved to be a figure that plays a significant role in Malaysia's contemporary political scene. Following his dismissal, Anwar launched a reform movement which aims to reveal of what he called an abuse of power and corruption among the ministers in the government. The movement took the streets as the arena of protest and for the first time the country had witnessed the biggest street demonstration ever since its independence. The massive rally has been dubbed as '*Reformasi*' and managed to attract thousands of Malaysian including those from the opposition parties such as Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS) and Democratic Action Party (DAP). Not only the demonstration had significantly reduced the racial boundary between Malay and non Malay, it also drastically changed the attitude of the Malay's middle class which often perceived as the beneficiary and not the adversary of the government authoritarianism through their active involvement in the rally (Hwang, 2003).

BERSIH'S MEDIA CONSTRICTION

Reformasi proved to be the catalyst for more audacious and massive street demonstration in Malaysia. In 2007, a movement comprising of 84 non-governmental organizations who called themselves as The Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections or BERSIH marched to the heart of Kuala Lumpur's in an effort to urge for a clean and fair election in Malaysia. Headed by Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan, a former president of the Bar Council and winner of the *International Women of Courage Award* in 2009 forwarded eight demands to the government, which were: "1) clean the electoral roll; 2) reform postal ballot, 3) use of indelible ink; 4) minimum 21 days campaign period, 5) free and fair access to media, 6) strengthen public institutions; 7) stop corruption, and 8) stop dirty politics" (BERSIH 2.0's 8 demands, n.d.). According to the reports in the blog sphere, despite the threats and warnings from the authorities, there were approximately 40,000 people took part in the BERSIH rally. Even with such an enormous scale, BERSIH rally was significantly ignored by the mainstream media (Lim, 2009). Due to the warnings from the government, the mainstream media took the incident lightly despite its importance as one of a major event in Malaysian history since the 1998 protest against the government (Mustafa, 2010). *Malaysiakini.com* – an online newspaper which is critical towards the

government has become the only local newspaper agency that provided serious coverage of the event. Although English mainstream newspapers, *The Star* and *The New Straits Times* did reported the event however the coverage were relatively limited. It appears that both newspapers clearly emphasizes on the economic implications caused by the rally and its illegality based on news reports on the traffic congestion, problems faced by the small businesses in Kuala Lumpur and the number of arrest made by the authorities (Lim, 2009). The eclipsed of the event in local mainstream media did not caused the international media to lose appetite as most of them seeing this event as a key moment in Malaysian politic. Among the international media that consistently follow the event was a news agency from Qatar, *Al-Jazeera*. Most Malaysian turned to *Al-Jazeera's* website to view streaming of videos and photographs taken from the scene. Unlike the mainstream local media, *Al-Jazeera* took a different path with a focus more on the alleged violence committed by the police against the protesters. El-Nawawy and Powers (2010) highlights the impact of *Al-Jazeera's* coverage as follows:

The images of the excessive force used against the protestors spread like wildfire. Independent news providers and bloggers posted links to AJE's coverage and more than 250,000 people watched it on Youtube.com during the first week after the protest. More importantly, a large number of Malaysians saw the images and debated the merits of the rally (p.78)

The contrast between the local mainstream media reportage and the international media coverage has sparked the polarization of opinion among Malaysian. Some of them blamed the organizer for mishandling their participants and letting them to cause chaos while others believed that the authorities triggered the violence by initiating unnecessary force on the protesters.

Considering no concrete changes have been made by the government, BERSIH launched several more rallies with the latest edition of its kind, BERSIH 3.0 which took place on 28 April 2012. Ten of thousands participants dressed in yellow, an official color of the movement inundated the capital city. With a theme of '*Duduk Bantah*' (Sit-In Protest), the goal of the protesters were to occupy Dataran Merdeka and sat there as an act of protest. However, the area around Dataran Merdeka was closed down by the authorities using barbed wire and fortification in order to prevent the protester from entering the area.

As many has predicted, the peaceful rally ended with riots and clashes between the protesters and the security forces. Furor during the BERSIH 3.0 rally stirred mix reactions among Malaysian. The former minister in the Ministry of Information, Communications and Culture, Datuk Seri Dr Rais Yatim criticized the rally as more suitable to be called '*Kotor 3.0*' (Dirty 3.0) since the organizers and their supporters did not respect the rule of law and sovereignty of the country ("Perhimpunan Bersih patut dinamakan '*Kotor 3.0*'", 2012). Former prime minister, Tun Mahathir in his personal blog viewed the rally as being the biggest and the most violent in its series and there is a possibility that it would get bigger

and more violent in the future (Mahathir Mohammad, 2012). However, a different tone was expressed by the *de facto* of the Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR), Anwar Ibrahim where he described the act of violence committed by the authorities towards the protesters who were representing millions of Malaysian as utterly disappointing. He elaborated that the usage of the government-controlled media to portray the protesters as criminal is just a classic statecraft of the authoritarian regime (Anwar Ibrahim, 2012).

Unlike the previous rallies, BERSIH 3.0 received a full media spectacle and became the main agenda for politicians. Its visual portrayal have turned into 'evidence' for the public to judge and the trend eventually lead to 'visual war' between the media who were sympathizers to the protesters and those who uphold the status quo of the country. In a protest movement, media coverage is very crucial in their effort to achieve their objectives. However, every behaviors displayed during a protests that attract media attention could also be the points that will undermine its legitimacy. Boyle, McLeod and Armstrong (2012) found that the media tend to be critical towards moderate and radical movement by de-emphasizing the objectives and the themes of the demonstration and put more focus on a specific events or situation that happened during the rally. Peschanski (2007) argued that the agenda and goals of social movement will get positive coverage if it's concerted with the interest of the media owner.

PHOTOJOURNALISM: MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

The usage of photography as propagandistic tools is nothing new. Quoting from the pioneer of photojournalism, Frank Luther Mott (as cited in Edom, 1976, p.32) in regards to this phenomenon: "the camera has a devastating effectiveness in portraying evils. It is the best crusader of our time. Think of any abuse – social, economic, political – and sound and honest pictures which will bring the evils to our eyes suggest themselves immediately". From this statement, it is clear that the process of selecting visual element for news is profoundly critical. It is even more evident in printed media such as newspaper as Kobre (1996) highlighted only 12 per cent of newspaper readers will read the news published on the front page if the news does not have pictures. If a picture is added, readings will be increased to 42 percent. Edom (1976) believed that photographs have a potential to provide a greater impact than just a word in a news article thus imperatively making the responsibility of photo editor very crucial. He argued that "the intentional or subconscious reasons for which he (photo editor) selects pictures for publications can, and likely will, mold the attitudes of his audiences" (Edom, 1976, p.130). Despite its importance, the impact of a photo is not restrictively under the control of a photo journalist or editor. According to Watriss (2012);

Taking photographs and telling a story with them is only the first step. Photojournalism at its best embodies our ability to benefit the issues and people with whom we connect...even in the best of times,

even when highly recognized within the field itself, our images are only tools, not an end in themselves.

Hence, images used in mass media are not merely served to represent the reality of an event in visual form rather it's a form of persuasion with multiple connotative meanings and ideologies embedded within its construction. Therefore, the present study aims to examine how the mainstream and alternative news media in Malaysia framed and highlighting their dominant values through the visual representation of BERSIH 3.0 rally. In this analysis, the visual construction of two prominent mainstream newspapers in Malaysia; *Utusan Malaysia* and *The Star*, and an alternative oppositional political-oriented newspaper, *Harakah* post BERSIH 3.0 rally were analyzed and discussed. In doing so, the study scrutinized the ideologies behind the usage of images on the front page of the newspapers, immediately after BERSIH 3.0 rally (the 29 April 2013 reportage for *Utusan Malaysia* and *The Star*; *Harakah* reportage in their 30th April – 3rd Mei 2012 edition, no. 1738) by analyzing its denotation and connotation meanings using the social semiotic approach. The social semiotic path taken in this research primarily concerned with the meaning potential of semiotic resources found in the visual representation with the emphasized on its ideational, interpersonal and compositional functions.

THEORY AND MODE OF ANALYSIS

Although semiotic gained its popularity in modern era, its existence has a very long history. Augustine, a Roman philosopher and linguist was the first person to introduce a study on 'sign' in 397 AD. In his view, sign is a bridge between nature and culture (Lester, 2003). According to Moriarty (2005), semiotics is a discipline that study sign and code in human communication. While signs are being incorporated in the process of producing, presenting and interpreting a message, codes determine its uses within the society. Manghani, Piper and Simons (2006) explained that in semiotic study, the main purpose of the research is to understand the meaning –making process and how it is presented in various forms. In semiotic theory, sign is defined as anything that is considered to represent something else. Saussure (1966 as cited in Manghani et al., 2006) explained this relationship by looking at sign as a combination of the 'signifier' – a word, images, sounds, gestures – and the 'signified', a concept or idea meant by a sign.

In 1964, Roland Barthes wrote an article entitled *The Rhetoric of the Image* which was considered as one of the classic works in the study of visual semiotics and rhetoric. In this article, Barthes raised several fundamental questions which concerned over the ability of image as a language and how it can build meaning in that context. He elongated the discussion on the concept of 'signified' and 'signifier' by incorporated the denotation and connotation layer of images (Moriarty, 2005). He explained that the denotation layer is the literal, direct and

specific meaning a viewer could discern from a sign. It is a clear description and representation shown by the visual artifact and the most easily understood message in an image. On the other hand, connotation is a meaning that is triggered by an object, whereby the object symbolizes something else and it is very subjective in nature.

As for photography, Barthes wrote a brief yet systematic and profound discussion on the medium in his book entitled *Camera Lucida*. In this book he explained that photograph can be interpreted in two ways, a concept which he termed as *studium* and *punctum* (Rose, 2007). At a *studium* level, audience interprets the signs available in a photo using their culturally informed reading. However, in certain situations a photograph could render something beyond *studium* which require a second level of reading which *punctum* is. *Punctum* is a sensitive point within an image which is unintentional and can not be generalized (such as scratches or bruises on an individual in a picture) but could 'disturb' the reader's conscientiousness because it is outside of their norm and viewing habits. Barthes (1982, p.51 as cited in Rose, 2007) states that "while the *studium* is ultimately always coded, *punctum* is not". Therefore, Barthes believes that there are parts in an image that surpassed the literal meaning of it.

Theo van Leeuwen (2001) argued that the main idea in visual semiotic according to Barthesian tradition is their interest in the layers of meaning inherent in visual images. He believe that the Barthesian tradition of visual semiotic could delineating a way in answering questions pertinence to what and how ideologies is presented by images. A social semiotic approach in visual communication context shared the same views but extending it by looking at several forms of 'rules' which emerged from the existing law, the influence of prominent individuals, opinion from experts, daily habits and other resources based on specific context. Jewitt and Oyama (2001) further suggest that the social semiotic approach towards visual artifacts is also interested to know what can be said about the images and how the researcher's interpret audience's evaluation of the images. Therefore, social semiotic is often used as a tool in a critical study.

In 1996, two prominent visual social semiotic scholars, Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen developed a critical discourse analysis on grammatical convention of contemporary visual communication. They interested to understand the motives and ideologies behind a visual image. They published a book that addresses the questions entitled *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* which being considered as significant in the field of visual study. They construed the idea that visual grammar also has a similar function to explain how a representation of a man, a place or an object can be composed to become a visual statement just like textual grammar in the context of describing how words are woven to form clauses and sentences in language. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) explains:

Visual structures realize meanings as linguistic structure do and thereby point to different interpretations of experience and different

forms of social interaction. The meanings which can be realized in language and in visual communication overlap in part, that is, some things can be expressed both visually and verbally; and in part they diverge – some things can be ‘said’ only visually, others only verbally. (p.2)

So, in this context Kress and van Leeuwen place visuals at par with linguistic and believe that in some circumstances, a message can only be communicated either verbally or visually. By taking this stand, they postulate that it is possible to develop a visual grammar in order to understand visual images and its messages. If in the field of linguistic something is expressed through words and semantic structure, in visual communication something is expressed through the choices of color and compositional structure of the image (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996).

Kress and van Leeuwen divided their visual grammar into three metafunctions of communication which is ideational, interpersonal and textual (Goodnow, 2010). The Ideational metafunction is looking into ways in which sign represent the real world while the interpersonal metafunction delve into the relationship established between the signs, the producer of the signs and the receiver of the signs. The ideational metafunction consist of two distinguished patterns which is the narrative and conceptual patterns. The narrative pattern communicates the ‘story’ of the image to the audience with the existence of ‘vector’, a diagonal line that connects each participant in the image in an act of ‘doing something’ or ‘something is happening’. Goodnow (2010) described the narrative pattern as revealing the unfolding of an event portrayed by the image. Meanwhile, the conceptual pattern illuminates the taxonomy of the participants represented in the image. It visually defines, analyze and classify a group of people, places or objects into certain groups or categories.

Apart from representing an event, images also capable to interact and build some kind of relationship with its audience. At this level, an image involve with an audience at the interpersonal level in which an image influence the judgment of the audience in their process of interpreting what is being displayed. Based on visual social semiotic perspective, there are three essential factor in the realization of this meaning which is distance, contact and point of view (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001). The combination of these three components will build a complex but subtle relationships between the image and the audience. For example, a photo that displays a person looking directly to a viewer can be construed as trying to make contact with the viewer. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) pictures containing this kind of contact can be classified as a picture that demanding something from its viewer which is symbolized through the gaze of the actor depicted in the image. To explore the ‘desire’ of the picture, viewer has to interpret other points or indicators such as facial expression and body gesture. For images that do not make such a contact, Kress and van Leeuwen defined them as an ‘offer picture’ in which the picture is offering something or some kind of information to the viewer.

To understand the holistic message of an image, the third element that needs to be considered is its compositional structure. Compositional meaning according to Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) is “the way in which the representational and interactive elements are made to relate to each other, the way they are integrated into a meaningful whole” (p.181). The positioning, saliency and framing of the elements in a visual composition sends a specific message to the audience. Kress and van Leeuwen argued that each of these aspects (positioning, saliency and framing) connotes its own unique meanings and representing its own particular ideologies. The overall combination of the ideational, interpersonal and compositional metafunctions will eventually dictates the way an audience perceived an image and open the possibility for the ideologies to be transmitted.

Utusan Malaysia: Violent, Dirty

The front page of *Utusan Malaysia* (the masthead is change to *Mingguan Malaysia* for Sunday circulation) dated 29 April 2012, a day after BERSIH 3.0 contained four separately framed photos in their respective positions. It's not a usual practice of the newspaper to insert up to four photos to cover an event in its front page. This gives an indication that the editor of *Utusan Malaysia* emphasizes the importance of visual coverage of the event. The main image in a visual composition could be recognized based on its salience in terms of its size, position, contrast, color saturation, sharpness of focus or psychological salience (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). In this context, a photo that featured a group of demonstrators attacking a police patrol car situated nearly at the center of the page could be considered as the main photo thus making it as the main agenda of *Utusan Malaysia*.



Front page of *Utusan Malaysia* on 29 April 2013

Looking closely at the photo, there was a form of actional process transacted in this image. Among many, there are some actors who stand out and can be considered as prominent in this narrative. The first one is the man who was on top of the car, kicking at the severely cracked windscreen. There were also a few demonstrators approaching the car's window with a man dressed in dark shirt was seen trying to reach someone inside the car. Also noticeable was a man carrying a concrete block with his right hand as if ready to throw it to the person, should he/she was successfully pulled out of the vehicle. The phenomenon managed to attract the attention of at least 50 other participants who seems to share the same feeling and disgust towards the driver. In terms of interactive meaning, the photo seems to offer something to the audience since none of the participants make any sort of contact with the viewer. From the distance point of view, the photo was taken at a public distance which is defined as the distance where the audience can see the entire body of four to five participants in a frame. At public distance, the imaginative relationship established between the participants and the viewer is impersonal in nature where there is an invisible barrier existed between them which connotes that "the object is there for our (the viewer) contemplation only, out of reach, as if on display in a shop window or museum exhibit" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p.134). Therefore, the picture treats the viewer as, in Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) terms "an invisible onlooker" (p.124) which urging the viewer to contemplate what the picture has to offer. A non-transactional photo of bloodied policeman at a top of the main photo and a photo of a bunch of crushed motorcycles at the bottom seems to serve as the 'supportive evidences' and further the editor's 'violent rally' agenda.

Interestingly, Utusan Malaysia also inserted a photo showing a mob of demonstrator who took part in BERSIH 3.0 in which their ethnicity was revealed in its caption as Chinese. From the interactional point of view, the photo can be considered as a non-transactional since none of the participants make any obvious contact with the viewer thus making the participants as a subject of contemplation of the viewers. What is ideologically importance about this photo is its position on the right side of the page. As previously mention in this article, the right (Given) and the left (New) side of a page carries its own ideological significant. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (1996):

for something to be Given means that it is presented as something to which the viewer already knows, as a familiar and agreed-upon point of departure for the message. For something to be New means that it is presented as something which is not yet known, or perhaps not yet agreed upon by the viewer, hence as something which the viewer must pay special attention. (p.187)

Hence, the position of the photo connotes something that has already been known by the viewer and by using that knowledge the editor wants the viewers to interpret the role played by the Chinese in the rally.

The Star: Flashpoint!

The Star (the masthead is change to Sunday Star for Sunday circulation) on its front page uses four photos in framing the rally. Interestingly, its main photo featuring a group of demonstrators aggressively demolishing a police vehicle is exactly the same with the one used in Utusan Malaysia with some slight alteration as a result of a cropping. Taking that as an indicator, it is quite obvious that The Star seems to share its mainstream counterpart's view of the rally which is deemed as violent, chaotic and aggressive. However, The Star seems to using a different approach in detailing the event when it organized the photos in a chronological order. What makes it fascinating is that The Star also included a photo showing a mob of Chinese demonstrators (based on the Chinese physiognomic feature as commonly associated as having a fairer skin tone compare to other ethnics in Malaysia) marched in a group but under a different light, compare to the version in Utusan Malaysia. The photo contains a transactional action where the group saluting a policeman as they passed which creates a positive mood in the narrative of the picture.



Front page of *The Star* on 29 April 2013

Another significance sign is the position of the photo itself, nested at the center-top of the page. In the field of advertising, creative compositional techniques is essential in ensuring the message that the advertisers try to convey reaching effectively to their potential consumers. Normally, in an advertisement design the top part is deemed to represent the ideality of a product (what the product promised to its consumer) while the bottom part represent actuality of the product which usually contains the factual information of the product. The same concept is use when dealing with other visual construct in the media. By taking this stand, it is discernable that the editor wanted to associate the Chinese

group with the ideality of the rally which is a peaceful gathering until the actual outcome happened, which the mayhem committed by the other ethnic groups of the rally represented by the photo at the bottom. Therefore, it is such a paradox when the two mainstream newspapers seems to share the same view on one thing (the violent of the rally) while diverting in another (the Chinese portrayals in the event).

Harakah: People's Revivification

As a newspaper owned by one of the strong supporters of BERSIH 3.0 rally, *Harakah* featured an alternative view on the event through its visual representation. The newspaper uses three photos on its front page with a photo featuring the participants from a high angle as its main photo. The non-transactional photo captured the very essence of the rally where some of the participant were seen waving at someone while others seems busy with their camera as if they were attending a carnival instead of a protest that would change the fate of the country. Apart from the mob being diversely multiethnic, it is quite apparent that the numbers of man wearing white caps or kopiah dominate the image.



Front page of *Harakah* - 30th April – 3rd Mei 2012 edition, no. 1738

From the interactive point of view, the main photo seems to ‘offer’ something for the audience to ponder upon since there was no contact established between the participants and the audience. In addition, the photo was taken from a public distance which creates invisible boundaries between the represented participants and the viewer. The high angle chosen in this photo empowered the viewers with a better position in power relation thus strengthen the motive of the editor

to represent the participants in the image as an object of contemplation for the viewers. However, the power of the viewers is balanced with the ambience of the image. Apart from the massive number of the participants captured from this angle, the participants were also displayed no sense of fear or distressful as they marched bravely in a direction towards the viewers. The frontal angle of the image may become an important clue of the editor's intention which Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) described its connotation as "...part of our world, something we are involved with" (p.143).

Apart from that, Harakah also affixed two small photos on its front page. One of the photo depicted Anwar Ibrahim, wearing BERSIH collared t-shirt complete with hat and sunglasses shaking hand with one of the BERSIH 3.0 participant. In terms of interactive meaning, the photograph was taken from medium range at eye-level point of view which creates an equal power relation thus enable the viewer to involved personally with him. However, given Anwar's oblique position and no contact with the viewer, it had separated him from the viewers. Based on Anwar's background and position, this depiction enlightened his status as a prominent person in comparison to the viewers. The second small photo showed some protesters who were besieged by police officers in the middle of water assault. What can be deduced from the narrative, a few protesters were seen helping their friends who might be injured from the water cannon attack while other seems to show their anger through a hand gestures. Since the photo was taken from a far distance, it is appear that the editor try to direct the viewer's attention to contemplate the phenomenon.

DISCUSSION

In news media organization, the role of an editor is very important for he/she has the final say in the determining the final outcome of a news. As a gatekeeper to media organization, editors carried out their task in a structural context. Structure in this sense refers to all the element's involved in the process of information filtering such as the community plurality, types of newspapers and forms of ownership (Donahue, Olien & Tichenor, 1997). These elements certainly provided some constraints on the editors and affecting the reporting patterns.

In Malaysian context, most of the major media players are controlled either directly or indirectly by the government. According to Zaharom and Wang (2004), the concentration of media ownership among the organizations that have links with politicians has become a norm in Malaysia for a long time. Therefore, when an events that have the potential to destabilize the country, the mainstream media will collectively address the event in favor of the ruling party. Although it is goes without saying that the mainstream media would propagate the government's perspective on BERSIH 3.0, the two mainstream media examined in this study, namely *Utusan Malaysia* and *The Star* also embedding their own agendas in unfolding the event visually. The aggressiveness and violent nature of the rally became the main highlight in both newspapers on the 29 April 2012.

The narrative of the main photo used in both newspapers vividly described the behavior of the demonstrators as contrast to the norms and values inherent among the Malaysian society. The person who was seen carried a concrete block intensified the aggressiveness and giving an impression of the protesters as reverted back to the 'Stone' age, uncivilized and tend to resort to brutal solution whenever a conflict arises.

While agreeing on the violent side of the rally, both newspapers however were at odds when illustrating their own ideology. For Malaysian media scholars and historian, *Utusan Malaysia* is a news media eminent for its Malay agenda. Tracing back the history of its development, *Utusan Melayu Berhad* (which *Utusan Malaysia* is one of its products) was initially known as *Kumpulan Utusan* (Utusan Group) and based in Singapore. When Malaya gained her independence in 1957, it's headquarter was moved to Kuala Lumpur. *Utusan Melayu Berhad* is considered significant in the history of this country which through two of its earliest product, *Utusan Melayu* and *Utusan Zaman* it has become a forefront of intellectual development and political literacy among Malay nationalist in preparation for the nation's independence (History of Utusan Group, n.d.). Among many of the mainstream news media, *Utusan Malaysia* is seen as the main media for the ruling party since a big portion of its share belong to some individuals in the United Malay National Organisation (UMNO), the biggest component of BN (Mohd Safar Hasim, 1996/2004).

As a newspaper that renowned for its Malay's agenda, *Utusan Malaysia* put forwarded its concern over the effort to destabilize the status quo of the country. The inclusion of a photograph portraying a mob of Chinese demonstrator with the word 'Chinese' clearly mentioned in its caption evidently has its own intention. The Chinese parade in a triumphal mood was arranged strategically on the left side of the page which according to Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) brings the connotation that the event portrayed is something the viewers already knew or familiar with. The intention could be interpreted by looking at the country's long history of political power struggle in which the May 13 tragedy immediately come to the mind of most Malay. The incident which involved mainly the Malay and the Chinese, including a portion of Indian community in a pit of a worst racial riot the country's ever encounter have claimed many lives. It was all began shortly after the 1969 general election which saw the opposition won many seats which they consider it as a huge success for them. DAP and Gerakan was overjoyed with the result and want to celebrate it in the streets of Kuala Lumpur. The police have given them the permission to hold marches in some areas but they were allegedly deviated from the original route and purposely entered the Malay settlement of Kampung Baru. According to von Vorys (1975) they taunted and ridiculed the Malays who saw the parade by shouting 'Malays out', 'go-die' and 'go back to villages' while exhibiting obscene gestures to them. Some of them even brought a large broom as a symbolic to 'sweep' the Malay out of Kuala Lumpur and back to their villages (Hatta Al-Mukmin, n.d.). The extreme

provocation had caused the Malays to hold a counter parade which eventually lead to a bloody racial riot between the Malays and the Chinese. By inserting a Chinese parade in a jubilant mood in BERSIH 3.0 coverage, it is seen as an attempt of the editor to conjure up the dark memory and enliven the myth that the Chinese is always eager to seize the dominant power of the Malay in this country. By combining the main photo that feature the Malay in an aggressive behavior on the right side of the page and a triumphal Chinese parade on a left side, it is quite obvious that the editor's believe whenever the Malays is out of control, the Chinese always benefitted from it.

In *The Star*, the usage of the Chinese parade photo contains a different ideology. The transactional narrative between one of the Chinese participants and the policeman brought another layer of meaning apart from the cheerful and joyous parade as illustrated by the image. The 'salute' gesture commonly use in an arm forces as an act of respect and obedience performed by the participant seemingly portrayed the Chinese mob as respectful towards the authority and in no intention to cause any harm. They behave in an ideal manner as suggested by its positioned on the top-centered of the page. In addition, since the photos were arranged in a chronological order, the Chinese parade photo situated at the middle of the order symbolically represent the calm and orderly moment of the rally before it turned violent. In comparison to the main photo, the editor seems to urge the viewers to decide on who is supposed to be blamed for the chaos occurred during the rally.

Although subtle, the positive representation of the Chinese participation in *The Star* coverage is quite predictable based on the current situation of the Chinese politic. The Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) political influence is quite substantial in *The Star* because they controlled 58 percent of its stake through Huaren Holdings. In 1987, the newspaper's license was suspended in *Operasi Lalang* for allegedly insinuating racial sentiments and encourages the Chinese community to oppose the government (Mahathir Mohammad, 2011). When it returns in operation, it has become one of the media used by MCA to forward its political agenda. The 2008 general election has seen MCA performed very poorly in which the party only won 15 seats out of 40 contested by its candidates. The party's poor performance in the 2008 general election has put them in a desperate position to regain the trust of the Chinese community towards them. According to Zubaidah (2012), at present a large number of the Chinese professionals and those who received Western education has lost faith in MCA and tend to support the opposition parties although they do not necessarily agree with them. Aware of the situation, it seems that the editor would use any chances to support the Chinese community as part of the effort to gain their trust even if it means that they have to break away from their mainstream newspaper counterparts such as *Utusan Malaysia*.

Unlike the mainstream newspaper, *Harakah* put forward the rise and the unity of the people from different races in Malaysia in their struggling for social

justice as their main theme. The uses of high angle in the main photo managed to capture the excitement and the support that BERSIH 3.0 received and at the same time put them under the microscope of the viewer to contemplate. The frontal angle of the image put the depicted protesters in the same world as the viewers and portrays them as ordinary individuals who have made a decision to be part of the great battle for social justice in this country. Since the protesters were depicted in a much lower power hierarchy in comparison to the viewer, it makes it 'reachable' for the viewers to be part of them if the viewer chooses to. Taking color as semiotic sources, the editor wrote the headline in yellow and white which carries its own connotation. While using yellow, the official color of BERSIH movement to write 'BERSIH 3.0', the editor used white font color for '*Rakyat Bangkit*' (People Rise). Indeed, color has a complex meaning especially when understood in the context of different culture. In the context of local culture, white is often associated with innocence, purity and freedom. In that sense, *Harakah* was trying to display the concept of noble struggle for social justice regardless of racial differences in this country with BERSIH as its platform.

Apart from the rise and unity of the people as the dominant theme of *Harakah*, the newspaper also subtly showcased its political party's ideologies in the visual composition of the event. Among others was the portrayal of several demonstrators wearing the *kopiah* marching side by side with individuals from other races (identified based on their physiognomic features) which shows that the Islamic party support the mutual respect between different races and religions. Interestingly, most of the PAS members depicted in the photo were young individuals, hence strengthen the party's argument that PAS is continuously being accepted by young generation and there will always be continuity in PAS struggle for true Islamic rule in Malaysia. Since the birth of Pakatan Rakyat (PR) or the oppositions pact that consist of PKR, DAP and PAS after the 2008 general election, the incumbent party has always questions PAS commitment in the pact. The insertion of Anwar Ibrahim photo instead of PAS prominent leaders on the front page is seen as a symbolic to the commitment of PAS in PR and they still recognize Anwar's leadership as the opposition's pact leader. The inclusion of a photo showing the authorities used of forces on the protesters signify that the newspapers have a different perspectives on the furor that happened during the rally.

Overall, the analysis on the three newspapers reveals that visual composition of newspapers does carry its own ideologies apart from the news itself. Photo is not merely an object for appealing purposes but could also serve as a propagandistic tool in its own accord. In Malaysian context, the mainstream media is well understood to play a role in propagating the government view on a particular issue but little is known on how they masked the mainstream idea with their own. This study reveals that while inseminating the idea of violent rally to their readers, *Utusan Malaysia* and *The Star* does manipulating the construction,

turning it into a platform to debate on who should be blamed for the uproar and who benefitting from the frantic Malays. The meaning behind the visual construction would easily go unnoticed among those who are not familiar with both newspapers but for their loyal reader it is such an imperative sign that could reinforce their strongly hold beliefs and opinion in regards to racial politic in Malaysia. *Harakah* on the other hand remained solid as a political newspaper as it seized the opportunity to promote its own party and refute all the allegations surrounding their commitment in the opposition pact.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jamali Bujang Sanawi is a lecturer at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS). He can be reached at the following e-mail address: *bsjamali@fss.unimas.my*

REFERENCES

- Anwar Ibrahim. (2012, April 30). Bersih 3.0: a celebration of unity, an awakening for liberation. (Blog post). Retrieved from <http://anwaribrahimblog.com>.
- BERSIH 2.0's 8 demands (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://bersih.org>
- Boyle, M. P., McLeod, D. M. & Armstrong, C. L. (2012). Adherence to the protest paradigm: the influence of protest goals and tactics on news coverage in U.S. and international newspapers. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 17(2), 127-144.
- Donohue, G. A., Olien, C. N. & Tichenor, P. J. (1997). Structure and constraints on community newspaper gatekeeper. In D. A. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Social meanings of news: A text-reader* (pp. 95-106). California: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Edom, C. C. (1976). *Photojournalism: Principles and practices*. Iowa: Wm. C. Brown Company Publishers.
- El-Nawawy, M. & Powers, S. (2010). Al-Jazeera English: a conciliatory medium in a conflict-driven environment? *Global Media and Communication*, 6(1), 61-84.
- Goodnow, T. (2010). Visual bias in Time's "the great divide": a semiotic analysis of Clinton and Obama photographs. *American Behavioral Scientists*, 54(4), 406-416.
- Hatta Al-Mukmin. (n.d.). *Keranamu UMNO*. Kuala Lumpur: Mukminin Publication.
- History of Utusan Group. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.utusangroup.com.my>
- Hwang, I. W. (2003). *Personalized politics: The Malaysian state under Mahathir*. Pasir Panjang: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- Jewitt, C. & Oyama, R. (2001). Visual meaning: a social semiotic approach. In T. van Leeuwen & C. Jewitt (Eds.), *Handbook of visual analysis* (pp. 134-156). London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Kobré, K. (1996). *Photojournalism: The professionals' approach*. (3rd ed.). Newton: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Kress, G. & van Leeuwen, T. (1996). *Reading images: The grammar of visual design*. London: Routledge.
- Lester, P. M. (2003). *Visual communication: Images with messages*. (3rd ed.). California: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning.
- Lim, M. K. (2009). The function of blogs in democratic discourse. *Journal of Global Communication*, 2(1), 313-326.
- Mahathir Mohammad. (2012, May 4). Bersih 3.0. (Blog post). Retrieved from <http://chedet.cc>.
- Mahathir Mohamad. (2011). *A doctor in the house: The memoirs of Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad*. Petaling Jaya: MPH Group Publishing Sdn Bhd.
- Manghani, S., Piper, A. & Simons, J. (2006). Introduction: semiotic. In S. Manghani, A. Piper & J. Simons (Eds.), *Images: A reader* (pp. 101-104).

- London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Mohd Safar Hasim. (2004). *Akhbar dan kuasa: perkembangan sistem akhbar di Malaysia sejak 1806*. Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Universiti Malaya. (Original work published 1996).
- Moriarty, S. (2005). Visual semiotic theory. In K. Smith, S. Moriarty, G. Barbatsis & K. Kenney (Eds.), *Handbook of visual communication: Theory, methods and media* (pp.227-241). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- Mustafa K. Anuar. (2010). Teaching ‘best practices’ of journalism in Malaysia. *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, 20, 177-182.
- Perhimpunan Bersih patut dinamakan ‘Kotor 3.0’. (2012, April 28). Utusan Malaysia. Retrieved from <http://www.utusan.com.my>
- Peschanski, J. A. (2007). Communication of the oppressed: Alternative media and their political impact in contemporary Latin America. In K. Coyer, T. Downmunt & A. Fountain (Eds.), *The alternative media handbook* (pp. 154-162). Oxon: Routledge.
- Rose, G. (2007). *Visual methodologies: An introduction to the interpretation of visual materials*. (2nd ed.). London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- van Leeuwen, T. (2001). Semiotic and iconography. In T. van Leeuwen & C. Jewitt (Eds.), *Handbook of visual analysis* (pp. 92-118). London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- von Vorys, K. (1975). *Democracy without consensus: Communalism and political stability in Malaysia*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Watriss, W. (2010). Steps learned along the way: redefining photojournalism’s power. *Nieman Reports*. Retrieved from <http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/article/102074/Steps-Learned-Along-the-Way-Redefining-Photojournalisms-Power.aspx>
- Zaharom Nain & Wang, Lay Kim. (2004). Ownership, control and the Malaysian media. In P. N. Thomas & Zaharom Nain (Eds.), *Who owns the media* (pp. 249-267). Penang: Southbound Sdn. Bhd.
- Zubaidah Abu Bakar. (2012, June 29). MCA continues to shore up support. *New Straits Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nst.com.my>

